

Voice

Any activity that allows students to practice...

helping writers feel safe & accepted
noting moments of voice in writing & pictures
valuing and requesting diversity
rewarding risk – even over success
providing opportunities to hear the voices of others
writing to someone (letters, posters)
asking students to write voice in...or out
looking for voice in advertising, print and non-print resources

1. Rewriting Voice-Free Pieces

This is a simple activity, but it works wonderfully well. Find a sample of writing that is devoid of voice; they are everywhere. (Hint: Sad to say, textbooks are often a good source – memos, too!) Ask students to rewrite the piece, working individually or in pairs. They should try to put in as much voice as possible. Read revisions aloud to appreciate the contrast. Try this activity in reverse, too. Strange as it seems, taking voice out of a piece is also a good activity for building students' awareness of voice because in order to take it out, they have to understand what it is!

3. Hearing Voices

Collect short passages that exemplify strong or distinctive voice. Put them on overhead, and read them aloud. Ask the students to describe the person behind the voice – or even to name them if they know. The idea is to get a picture of the writer in your mind. Is it a man or a woman? Is he/she young or old (be careful now...) Where is the person from? What words describe the tone? Funny, sarcastic, thoughtful, reflective, bitter, charming? Talk about the clues that readers use to draw these inferences about the writer. Now ask what the reader of one of their own pieces might learn about them through their writing?